

# JAMES MACDONALD RICHMOND

(2/311)

## FAMILY

James Macdonald Richmond was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1888 at Wanganui to Maurice Wilson Richmond and Flora Hursthouse Richmond, (nee Macdonald). James came from a politically conscious and active family. His father Maurice was born in Nelson in 1862 after his parents had been evacuated from Taranaki to Nelson during the Taranaki Wars. Maurice was a lawyer and held a number of public positions. James's grandfather was the Honourable James Crowe Richmond, Native Minister of New Zealand. James was one of three children, having one brother and one sister.



## PRE WAR

James grew up in Wanganui and in 1901 attended Wanganui Collegiate where he qualified for the Board Scholarship with a 65 percent pass. James then attended Nelson Boys College from 1903 to 1906. In January 1906 he passed the Matriculation and Solicitor General Knowledge Examination.

James took an active part in the Dominion Boy Scouts movement. For at least six months, from June 1910 to January 1911 he had been Assistant Scoutmaster and Scoutmaster, under the supervision of Eric Lawson, Chief Scoutmaster of the Wellington Western Battalion. James commenced work as the Assistant Scoutmaster of Kilbirnie Troop but was then promoted to Scoutmaster in charge of Croyden Troop. He was known for his knowledge of Scouting matters and training and was well liked.

Between the years of 1909 to 1911 James was in the Cadets and in the Volunteer Corps, Officers Training Corps, attaining to the rank of Corporal.

James was keen to take up a position in the Defence Force and a letter was written on his behalf to Captain Spencer Smith. At this time James was attending Victoria College Officers Training Corps in Wellington, studying Law. The letter was written on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1911 and said, *"I have the honour to enclose an application by Corporal James Richmond of the Victoria College Officers Training Corps for a position in the defence forces. The applicant, who is the son of Professor Richmond, late Professor of Law at Victoria College, New Zealand University has had the best education obtainable in New Zealand and at the present time is completing the course for the Degree of Bachelor of Law. His military enthusiasm in proof of which I enclose letters from the Navy League and the Commander of Wellington West Battalion of Boy Scouts is however, such that he is desirous of forgoing an assured successful career in law to further the new Defence Scheme of this Dominion. He has just completed two years efficient service in the Officers Training Corps and his knowledge and ability as a Section Leader at the last Wellington Battalion Camp, at which he was attached to A Company called forth the praise of not only Captain Esson in command of A Company but of Captain Cowles....."* (end of letter).

The new Defence Scheme mentioned was 'The Defence Act 1909' which replaced the Volunteer forces with a Territorial force and compulsory military training. It provided for a territorial force, of fighting strength, fully equipped for modern requirements, of thirty thousand men. Under the terms of the Act, every male, unless physically unfit, was required to take his share of the defence of the Dominion. The Act provided for the gradual military training of every male from the age of fourteen years to twenty-five, after which he was required to serve in the reserve up to the age of thirty. From the age of twelve to fourteen every boy at school performed a certain amount of military training, and, on leaving, was transferred to the senior cadets, with whom he remained, undergoing training, until eighteen years of age, when he joined the territorials. After serving in the territorials until twenty-five and in the reserve until thirty, a discharge was granted; but the man remained liable under the Militia Act to be called up, until he reached the age of fifty-five. The scheme was set in motion in January, 1911. Major-General Sir Alexander Godley, of the Imperial General Staff, was engaged as commandant. (Wikipedia)

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1911 James achieved the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and at this time was attached to the Royal NZ Artillery Department, Wellington. A year later in July 1912 he was Temporary Lieutenant.

James served on the Executive of the Navy League for a period of five years, both at Nelson and Wellington. He was considered an authority on naval matters and a keen student of naval construction. He, on at least a couple of occasions was consulted by people needing accurate information on this

subject. James had an ability to recognise practically every ship and the class of ship not only in the British Service but those of other nations as well.

James was eager to join the Army and had letters of support from various men in various positions. These included Cecil Palmer, the Honourable Secretary of the Navy League, the Commander of Wellington Battalion of Boy Scouts and his Employer, Bell, Gully, Bell & Myers, Solicitors.

James worked for Bell, Gully, Bell & Myers as a Law Clerk for a period of about four years, 1907 to 1911, as well as studying at the University. He was under the direct supervision of Sir Francis Dillion Bell and for two years had been given the duty of looking after his personal papers and attending to the special work of Bell's department.

James wrote a letter himself to Captain Spencer Smith requesting a position in the Army. He wrote, *"I have the honour to apply for a position as officer under the Defence Scheme now being prepared for. I am at present serving as a Corporal in the Victoria College Officer Training Corps and am nearly at the end of my second year of service with that corps. I was passed as efficient at the end of my first years' service and obtained my Corporals certificate by examination. This year I have attended 76 parades, including the Company Christmas Camp at Forest Lakes, Otaki, (14 days) and the Battalion Camp at Karori, (10 days) recently concluded. 30 Parades per annum are required for capititation purposes and neither of the camps was compulsory. I have not yet had my annual training in Camp for this year within the meaning of the regulations as that cannot be done until our compulsory Company Camp next month. Though my rank is that of Corporal, I have had, during my service with the Officers Training Corps, considerable practice as a Section Leader and a certain experience of Colour-Sergeants work. In addition, I have of course had the benefit of the special training afforded to every member of the Corps. This as you are doubtless aware requires everyone, whatever his rank, to be trained to command a company. At our Christmas Camp we were for ten days of the fourteen days under the supervision of Captain G. C. Hamilton and were by him put through a special course of reconnaissance work involving road, railway, bridge and camp-site reconnaissance. In addition to this we had courses in field tactics, outpost work, rearguard and advance guard work, semaphore signalling, musketry, squad drill, company drill, camp routine work etc. I have been through the majority of these courses several times. I have also done additional private work of a minor character. This is the only training I have had apart from my cadet work. I was from 1897 to 1906 inclusive as a cadet, being for four years of that time at a state school and for the remaining six years at the Wanganui Collegiate School and Nelson College. I desire only to add that I have been for four years employed in a solicitor's office and have a good knowledge of office work and careful*

*business methods. For all but a few months of that time I have been clerk to Mr H D Bell K.C. and for the last two years his chief clerk and the work I have had to do for him includes, besides the ordinary office work, a large amount of work which may be described as secretarial and administrative. My age is 22. I shall be 23 in April.*" Dated 27<sup>th</sup> January 1911.

## **1914**

In 1914 James worked as an adjutant of the Wellington Garrison Artillery Division (territorials) and was said to be a quick and accurate observer with abilities above the average. It was noted in a letter that he was good tempered, tactful and energetic and had a natural gift for military sketching. The only negative comment was that he suffered from nervousness and needed to steady down. In previous reports for years 1912 and 1913 James was described as being of good manner and smart dress and did excellent work as Adjutant at the annual Wellington Garrison training camp.

James gained a Lieutenant's commission with the Royal New Zealand Artillery in April of 1914 and for a time was Assistant to the NZ Military Secretary. James was attested on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1914 at Awapuni.

James embarked with the Main Body, Field Artillery on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1914, as Acting-Adjutant to the O.C. Artillery as well as the ship. He sailed from Wellington aboard HMNZT 10, "Arawa". Other units on board the "Arawa" were the Wellington Infantry Battalion (less West Coast Company), Wellington Mounted Rifles (less 2 troops) and Signal Troop. There were 59 officers, 1259 men and 215 horses on board. The destination was Suez, Egypt and they arrived there on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1914.

## **1915**

James embarked for the Dardanelles on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1915. He landed in the first boat conveying New Zealand troops to the shores of Gallipoli and remained at Anzac Cove till the final day of evacuation, when he embarked in the last boat having volunteered to assist in the blowing up of an old Howitzer which was kept in action until the last moment.

James was promoted to Captain on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1915. He was also Staff Captain of the New Zealand Field Artillery.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1915 he was promoted to Brigade Major of the Divisional Artillery with the expansion of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to a Division.

James received a Citation for 'Mentioned in Despatches' (MID). "*In connection with their operations described in General I. Hamilton's despatch*", dated 11 December 1915 and printed in the London Gazette 28 January 1916.

A soldier mentioned in despatches (MID) is one whose name appears in an official report written by a superior officer and sent to the high command in which is described the soldier's gallant or meritorious action in the face of the enemy. In the British Forces the despatch was published in the London Gazette.

## **1916**

In January of 1916 James is recorded as being at Moascar, Egypt. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1916 he embarked for France aboard the steamer 'Hungerford' from Alexandria.

He served in Flanders and through the battle of the Somme in mid-September 1916.

James received a Citation for Military Cross which was in the London Gazette dated 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1916. It stated' *"26 April – 26 August 1915 Gallipoli. Has done much good work as Staff Captain since the force first landed on the Peninsula in the dual capacity of Brigade-Major and Staff Captain. His work since the present operations commenced on the 6 August has been particularly arduous and praiseworthy. This officer is my Brigade-Major and was on the peninsula throughout the whole of the operations and has done most excellent staff work throughout. I particularly request that he be decorated or rewarded."*

James received a second Citation for 'Mentioned in Despatches' (MID), *For distinguished and gallant services rendered during the period of General Sir C. Munro's command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force."* Printed in the London Gazette 13 July 1916.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1916 until the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 James was in Hesdin, France at the Staff School for courses in staff duties and was attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon.

## **1917**

James began 1917 by being admitted sick to hospital while in the field for a period of four days. He was then promoted to Major on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1917. In July James was able to have a weeks leave before rejoining his unit in the field.

James again received a Citation for 'Mentioned in Despatches' (MID). *"Operations from 28<sup>th</sup> September 1916 to 26<sup>th</sup> February 1917. An exceptionally able young officer with an unusual capacity for writing clear and easily intelligible operation orders, no matter how complicated the tactical situation. He is an exceedingly quick and accurate officer. The above qualities have been of the greatest use in his capacity as Brigade-Major, NZFA, during the 53 days the New Zealand Field Artillery were*

*engaged in the Somme battle, both to me and to the various CRAs, with whose command in the NZ Field Artillery was at times grouped. These CRAs have all written to me in most commendatory terms of Major Richmond's work and ability. His work as Brigade-Major has also been invaluable during the months we held the line at Armentieres and Fleurbaix. He is the sole survivor of a batch of four young NZFA Officers, and I should be pleased if his work could be recognized."* Printed in the London Gazette 1 June 1917.

James was made a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, (DSO) in 1917 with the following report.

*"Near Messines May 31<sup>st</sup> to June 7<sup>th</sup> 1917. He has worked incessantly during the recent operations, has been with the Divisional Artillery without a break since the Main Body left New Zealand, and has always shown great devotion to duty. I have always had great confidence in him as Brigade-Major. This has never been misplaced, and it has always enabled me to spend the greater part of my time going about the batteries and O.P.s and keeping in touch with the personnel of the Artillery of this Division. I recommend Major Richmond for the DSO. His staff work has been of a very high order"*.  
(Printed in the London Gazette on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1918.)

Finally James received a fourth Citation for 'Mentioned in Despatches' (MID).  
*"Mentioned in Field Marshall D Haig's despatch of 7 November 1917 for distinguished and gallant services and devotion to duty during the period February 26<sup>th</sup> to midnight September 20-21<sup>st</sup> 1917"*. Printed London Gazetted 28 December 1917.

## **1918**

James was detached to 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1918 and then posted as the Officer Commanding of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battery, New Zealand Field Artillery on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1918, relinquishing the appointment of Brigade Major to command a Battery and obtain further experience in the field.

He was appointed Commanding Officer, 2nd (Army) Brigade, NZ Field Artillery, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1918 as Lieutenant Colonel (appointment not ratified) as he was killed the same day.

Major James Richmond, DSO, MC was killed in action on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1918 at Le Cateau, France, aged 30 years. He was killed instantaneously by a 5.9 shell on the high road between Salesman and Le Quesney at the entrance to his new headquarters, a ruined cottage adjacent to the batteries. He died on a Sunday afternoon while in temporary charge of a brigade of Field Artillery. He was buried in Solesmes Communal Cemetery,

The service was officiated by Rev J. A. Jermyn. General Sir Andrew Russell and many of his comrades in the artillery attended the service.

Many tributes were paid from those in a position who knew James's true character, among them one from the Minister of Defence, who spoke of his distinguished record as one which his family, the people of New Zealand, and the N.Z.E.F. might justly be proud.

His commanding officer stated: "*I consider Major Richmond to be one of the most brilliant young officers I have ever known. As Brigade-Major his orders were never misunderstood. They were so clear and concise. He was tactful and had a charming manner. He was artistic, musical and extremely well read and had considerable literacy ability. He hated war and bloodshed and yet during all this war he has never left the front, except on brief leave. No thought of danger ever deterred him from doing his duty, and his standard of duty was a high one*".

The following was written by Brigadier-General G. N. Johnston," Commander, Royal Artillery, New Zealand Division:— "*Few people in New Zealand will realise that in Major J. M. Richmond, D.S.O., M.C., R.N.Z.A., who was killed by a 5.9 shell on the high road between Solesmes and Le Quesnoy on the afternoon of Sunday, 27th October, 1918, New Zealand lost one of her most promising Staff officers. "Leaving New Zealand with the Main Body in October, 1914, he served with the New Zealand Field Artillery without a break until the day of his death first as adjutant of the Field Artillery Brigade, and later, when the force expanded into a division, as Brigade Major of the Divisional Artillery, which appointment he held until the 14th August, 1918, when he relinquished it at his own request to command a battery. He landed in the first boat conveying New Zealand troops to the shore at Gallipoli, and remained at Anzac till the final day of evacuation. He accompanied the New Zealand Artillery to France and served in all the engagements in which the New Zealand Artillery took part. The infantry spends only a portion of its time in the line, whereas the artillery seldom leaves it. This necessitates a great deal of fighting in conjunction with other divisions, and all senior and Staff Artillery Officers with whom the New Zealand Artillery worked were loud in their praise of the work and abilities of Major Richmond. His orders were models of what orders should be; lucid and concise, they were never misunderstood, and his instructions were so well written that neighbouring Divisions often copied them. In thirty years' experience I have never known an officer who could so quickly grasp a complicated tactical situation and make it appear simple in orders. In addition, he combined with this quickness extreme thoroughness. It was most unusual to find the slightest mistake even in detail in any of his work. He also had a capacity for mental endurance and could continue working for 24 hours at a stretch during operations, only giving in when the critical stages of battle were over, when it was his habit to sleep for some 12 to 16 hours at a stretch. He had great tact in dealing with Commanding Officers of attached units; it is probably well known that in*

modern battles the Divisional Artillery is insufficient, and that generally in all battles in which the New Zealand Division took part three or more additional brigades of artillery reinforced it. Without exception the attached Brigade Commanders assured the C.R.A., New Zealand Division, that they had never been attached to a division where the orders were so clear and where so much help had been given by the Brigade Major in fact, it is not too much to say that Major Richmond established a reputation among senior officers of the Home Artillery as a staff officer of exceptional attainments. His eye for country was excellent; he could walk over a new bit of country, go back to Headquarters and do an accurate panoramic sketch of it from memory. "He made a most charming companion in mess, was exceptionally well read with a good memory, and was devoted to music. It was often his habit in Armentieres, where Headquarters were billeted in houses, to come into a room adjoining the office during a raid and relieve the strain by playing the piano. During a battle or raid it is necessary for the Divisional Staff to remain at Headquarters and direct operations, and the strain awaiting developments is severe. On ordinary days he visited the batteries, brigades, and observation stations and never shrunk from carrying out his duty no matter how dangerous. He hated bloodshed and I well remember his horror at seeing blood during the first day of landing at Gallipoli. When inoculated he always fainted and yet there were few braver men in the Division. On one of the last occasions on which I saw him he was trying to stem the flow of blood from a horse which had just been wounded near Havricourt Wood. Altogether he was a most interesting personality, and his death was a severe loss to the Division, as well as a great grief to his brother officers more particularly to his G.O.C., with whom he had been in closest association during the war. He was the last of four R.N.Z.A. officers who joined the regiment towards the end of 1910. Davies, Daniell, Tuner, Richmond all of whom have been killed in France. On the day of his death he had taken command of a brigade of field artillery and it was at the entrance to his new headquarters that he was killed. Copies of all orders and instructions issued by the New Zealand Divisional Artillery have been kept for record, should some future New Zealand Artillery officer wish to get a thorough knowledge of modern war in so far as it affects, artillery, and to learn how to write orders, he could not do better than to take his ideal those written by Major J. M. Richmond".

James had been engaged to be married to his 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin in England after the war and had decided to resume the profession of lawyer.

Finally we quote the words of Sir James Allen, who wrote: "Major Richmond's distinguished record on the field is one of which his family, the people of New Zealand, and the New Zealand Expeditionary Force may justly be proud". We may add that the College is equally proud of such an alumnus; but great is the regret that one whose brilliant faculties, trained and disciplined in the hard school of war, might have led him far should be thus cut off ere he reached maturity. "

Researched by Robyn Parkes for WW100 exhibition 2014.

SOURCES

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